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The Reader Writes

• 'Need to Know'

TO THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR:

The public should be made aware of a development in security regulations that is having a disastrous effect on the exchange of scientific information. The cause behind this situation is the catchy but insane phrase "Need to Know." This phrase was initially interpreted as a requirement that a person must, despite his security clearance, establish a "Need to Know" before being given classified information. Security officials have become, seemingly, so intrigued with this phrase that it is now necessary to establish a "Need to Know" for any information that is generated by military or private firms engaged in defense research, classified or unclassified.

The insidious nature of this preoccupation with "Need to Know" lies not only in the stifling effect of controls on unclassified information but in the ambiguity

of what constitutes a "Need to Know." At best, the requirement leaves the determination of who needs to know what up to a document clerk or other person equally unqualified to make such a decision. As practiced, there is a pyramid of other requirements so that it is now necessary to have a government contract in the precise field for which the information is required and then obtain approval from a government contracting officer before receiving even unclassified information.

This means that a firm, having security clearance, engaged in research and development in a field of potential major scientific value to the country but without a government contract finds it impossible to obtain necessary unclassified information from government contractors engaged in similar work. Where formerly there was an average of three months of frustrating effort required to obtain a necessary classified document it has become, in many cases, completely impossible to obtain needed unclassified documents.

If we are at all concerned with the advancement of knowledge, the dissemination of information is fundamental. Our security system, as currently operated, is seriously and unnecessarily hampering the scientific development of this country. A reevaluation of the security system is overdue. In the meantime I suggest an immediate removal of the "Need to Know" requirement on unclassified information.

Wilmington, Mass. William W. Allen

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